

The following article was posted on March 14th, 2018, in the Santa Maria Sun - Volume 19, Issue 2

Santa Barbara County Commission for Women to host listening sessions in Guadalupe and Santa Maria

By KASEY BUBNASH

Fears of deportation, sexual harassment, rape culture, and discrimination are just some of the topics that will be welcomed and up for discussion at the Santa Barbara County Commission for Women's upcoming Women Speak Up events.

The Commission for Women, which hosted four Women Speak Up events in southern Santa Barbara County earlier this month, will complete its tour with listening sessions on March 15 and 16 in Guadalupe and Santa Maria. The listening sessions, according to Susan Foley, business specialist for Santa Barbara County, will give local service agencies, women, and families an opportunity to share their specific needs and ideas with the Commission for Women.

The key points of each discussion will then be included in a report, Foley said, which is expected to be completed by the commission and presented to the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors sometime in April.

Discussions have been fairly similar at each Women Speak Up event held so far, Foley said. Community members all over the county, she said, have shared concerns about families facing deportation, a lack of mental and physical health care services in the county, and recently heightened fears of gender, race, and sexual orientation discrimination.

Many women have expressed concerns regarding sexual assault and harassment, and some men, who Foley said are welcome to attend, have initiated interesting discussions about how and when to teach boys respectful behavior.

"Those are pretty key issues facing everyone locally and globally," Foley said.

This year's tour was almost entirely inspired by a single listening session held in Santa Barbara around the same time last year. The event was extremely successful, Foley said, but attendees overwhelmingly asked that similar events be made accessible to other areas of the county and to Spanish speakers.

The Commission for Women included increasing listening sessions in its report and presentation to the Board of Supervisors last year, which resulted in funding for additional Women's Speak Up events in other areas of Santa Barbara County this year.

A Women's Speak Up listening session will be held at 5:30 p.m. in Guadalupe City Hall on March 15, and at 5:30 p.m. in English and 7:15 p.m. in Spanish at Santa Maria's Marian Regional Medical Center on March 16.

"So that was a big one that came out of last year's event," Foley said. "I think it would be interesting to figure out how the commission can do this every year."